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ABSTRACT

Nine interviews are presented with persons connected with Oklahoma businesses, a children's hospital, and the Oklahoma City Police Department. The intent of the presentation is to demonstrate the need for Americans to acquire skills in foreign languages. A range of topics is covered in the interviews, such as, the usefulness of specific foreign languages, how personnel use foreign languages, situations in which a need for a foreign language was felt, and foreign languages in the schools. (AMH)

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Languages The PLUS In Today's World

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FOREWORD

The world is growing smaller. We are living in an information society. One of the ways — the principal way, in fact — that we transfer information is through languages. Technology has speeded up the ability to move information from one part of the world to another, but comprehension of that information is still dependent upon languages.

Just about 150 years ago, the last major battle in the War of 1812 was fought a full month after the peace treaty had been signed in England. When President Lincoln was assassinated, it took 12 days for the news to travel from Washington to London. Today, that kind of important news can be reported instantly, as it happens.

The need for a working use of foreign languages is compounded by this technology. The interviews with Oklahoma business and professional men and women, recorded in this book, are supportive evidence of the value, and the need, for young Americans to learn a foreign language. Oklahoman's produce agricultural and industrial products that are shipped all over the world. We buy other products from foreign nations for our use and consumption here at home. Only language can serve as the tool to conclude these transactions on a basis that is profitable to all. I strongly support and encourage the study of foreign languages.

Oil! This one word has come to symbolize international relations, trade, languages, contact and conflict. In Oklahoma, scenes like this stress the growing need for men and women skilled in more than one language.

Leslie Fisher
State Superintendent

July, 1981

AN EXPLANATION

These interviews were gathered during the months of October and November by Alfred Gage and Barbara Duffy of the Curriculum Section of the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The initial intent was to gather material for a slide/tape presentation on the same topic – the need for Americans to acquire skills in foreign languages.

Many persons, of course, could have made valuable interviewees; the choice of those that you see here came about because of several circumstances. The inclusion (or exclusion) of anyone or his or her company is, in no way, to be interpreted as an endorsement (or rejection) of the person or company.

In the interest of candor, we must say that most of the interviews were longer than appear here. We have edited the material from the tapes so as to be able to present the tenor of the conversation without the sometimes very lengthy conversations. Most of the questions you see here are really summaries of the actual questions asked; however, the respondent's words are verbatum. Only extraneous material has been eliminated. All indicated emphasis in print is ours.

Alfred Gage, Specialist
Foreign Language Education

Oklahoma
State Department of Education

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CMI CORPORATION

(Manufacturer of road building equipment)

Tom Kendall, Vice President of International Sales

Are you just recently in international trade?

We have been doing a good sized business here for the last three years.

As a foreign language consultant, I have a great deal of difficulty in convincing the people of Oklahoma that right here we have businesses which have a need for employees with language skills. And by extension, the needs of the United States. What would you say to those people?

I would say that the people of the U.S. are renowned for their lack of language ability. People almost take it for granted that we don't know another language because the vast majority of our people might take two years in school – Spanish or Latin like I took – and that's the end of it. Even if they take four years of Spanish, for instance, they speak it fairly poorly.

I think you commented that your daughter had taken four years of Spanish and still felt inhibited.

Yes, that's right. I am a great advocate of taking the type of course where you can speak it.

But, this might depend on what kind of use you make of your skill. If you want to write a service manual, for instance, it would be different.

Well, that's another point too. That's one of our big problems. As a matter of fact, I have a gentleman who was born in Cuba and he speaks excellent Spanish and of course writes it, too. Everything that we have published, he sees, so that, number one, it's in proper engineering phraseology and number two, the grammar and the Spanish is correct.

Is Spanish the language CMI needs most? Why?

Well, the South American countries are becoming more and more nationalistic. They do not want to speak English. They may speak perfect English. I have a gentleman in my office right now from Venezuela and our dealer fr m Venezuela is there and my man that covers South America. The customer has spoken maybe four words of English although I know very well he can understand English and he can probably speak it. But, they want to speak Spanish.

As a businessman do you feel that the U.S. is losing out to other nations because of our lack in language skills and a knowledge of other cultures?

I'm not as conscious of that because of my own lack of a language perhaps. I think the general public – in particular the educated ones, like contractors and engineers, etc., – are very receptive to people from the U.S. Number one, they'd be even more so if we knew the language; and number two, if we knew more of their own country.

What would you tell a 12 year old who came to you for advice on preparing for international business?

Well, I still feel that Spanish is the most important language. So, number one, they would have to know their profession – whatever it is that they are going to try to do. That's the paramount thing. Number two, I would say they should know a language and I would say Spanish would be an excellent one to start out with because you could branch out from there to Italian and Portuguese and so forth without too much trouble if you understand it.

You have said that other things being equal, the employee with language skills has a head start as far as initial employment, or promotion.

Yes, for instance, we have a young gentleman who joined us about three years ago and he had just graduated from the international school – Thunderbird – and he said he had some Spanish as a result of that. We hired him and he spent two years in what we call sales coordination, where he's quoting prices and figuring, and primarily learning our equipment. He'd had a little bit of construction experience when he was going through college working as an operator on a piece of equipment. As a result of the fact that he did know Spanish I assigned him to take over the Mexican Territory and he's now living down there with his wife. If he had not had Spanish, he would have had no chance whatsoever to get that job because it requires somebody with Spanish ability. He went down there and I had him take a crash course again so he could brush up. We've just reassigned and promoted another individual here in the factory for a position in Mexico, too. We would have preferred somebody who spoke Spanish, but we

didn't have anybody in that category. He'd taken two years of it so he had at least a slight background.

Have there been occasions overseas on a social level – say at a customer's home – where your lack of minimal skills has been a problem?

I find that, number one, people like to speak their own language and it's a natural tendancy in a group. I would say, however, that you do miss out on a lot of conversation. I think in the business aspect of it, even though you are able to speak English to the individual to whom you're talking – a prospective customer – you are unable to understand what he turns to his side and talks to his partner about or to your dealer about. You're not able to understand what your dealer is telling your customer. So you don't know if your dealer is saying the right thing or not and it puts you in an extremely awkward position. You don't know what he's said.

Thank you for your time.

We've been looking for five or six months now for a secretary who could understand and speak Spanish with ease and we finally found a young **lady** who has just graduated from OSU and she's a Spanish major.

So the opportunities are not just in sales or management?

Yes, . . . well, finance, for instance, we have people here who are trying to get loans for people down in South America and it helps if they can read the Spanish version of anything they get . . . it would be delightful to have a service engineer in our company who could go down there who speaks Spanish. He could save nearly half the time he spends trying to talk to the maintenance type of individual who doesn't know English. You see, you get down to the lower levels and they don't understand English.

THE WILLIAMS COMPANIES

Ben Boddie, Vice President of Corporate Communications

Do you find French quite useful in the Middle East?

Yes, French is used. You find French and English. I suppose that if a person knows French and English he is much better off. Those are the two languages I would like to know and those are two I happen to speak.

They tell me that in Latin America, that may not be quite as true – French and English being universally useful.

Yes, but you have to know Spanish and Portuguese. We often run into areas where you speak Portuguese. But then if you have a knowledge of French or any romance language you are able to basically follow the conversation.

The Williams Companies deal in what areas or businesses?

We deal in energy, fertilizer and metals. The last issue of Fortune magazine showed that the Williams Companies was one of the largest – I don't remember exactly, perhaps the 15th largest exporter in the United States in dollar volume. This is in fertilizer and fertilizer materials.

Is there oil in your international business interests?

No, the oil business is domestic; the fertilizer business we're in Brazil, Argentina, Ireland, Korea and just the other day we announced a plan for a big project in Tanzania, and we have many others on the drawing board in other countries around the world.

Our project deals with trying to get Oklahomans to realize the usefulness of studying foreign languages. What would you say on the subject?

Yes, I would say it is very helpful for a person to learn a foreign language . Even if he is not going into international trade. I think it broadens your knowledge of other cultures around the world. For instance, here we print annual reports, brochures and items in Chinese, Portuguese, French, Spanish and a number of other languages. The knowledge of a foreign language lets you know that the people of the cultures are different from ours and you are able to think a little bit better about how they think and how they react. In other words, it expands your mind beyond Tulsa, Oklahoma and that's very helpful.

What kinds of positions within your companies are there where languages would be an added, desirable skill?

There would be executive positions because when you send a person overseas you have to be in an executive position. It's very costly to send a person overseas, but a person's ability to get one of these positions is enhanced by his knowledge of a foreign language. We certainly like for the person to be able to speak a foreign language and his chances of getting a better job are much better if he knows a foreign language.

Even on initial employment?

Yes, that ability would help a great deal when we are hiring in the Williams Companies.

Would foreign language skills be helpful in your companies even on a clerical level?

Yes, I feel that a foreign language is helpful to anybody. For instance, my secretary has to have a basic knowledge of a language or two. She often is required to know how to look up a word in a dictionary so she's not at a total loss when something comes in a foreign language or she has to know who to go to to get it translated if it's difficult. We even print things in Arabic here . . . But, I've found living overseas that the children of the French and the English knew a great deal about what was going on in this country. They could name the president of the U.S., they could talk about our foreign policy. The American student would have a very difficult time telling you who the president of France is and as the world grows smaller with communications and quick travel, we are going to have to deal with foreign people and with other countries. And their ability to speak English – our inability to speak their language gives them a decided advantage over our students. And it will give them an even greater advantage in the future if we don't do something about it.

Do you think our international business is slipping because of it?

That's correct. It is slipping. You find that most Japanese who come to America speak English. But they want to do business with us. We don't go to them speaking Japanese. The same thing goes for Spanish and any other language.

What advice would you give the public schools and the foreign language teacher?

I would give the advice to the school system that it should be imperative for a person to learn a foreign language or take at least two years of it because the U.S. must engage in world trade to survive. Whether the student learns it or not, he knows something about the culture and how other people react. If we don't, we're going to be in serious trouble. In fact, we're getting in serious trouble now. But, I also think that a foreign language is part of discipline for a student that is something that requires study and dedication. We shouldn't let students take the easiest route possible, because they're not going to have the easiest route for the rest of their lives. They're going to have to do some things they don't want to do. Here's a chance to prepare them for that.

UNARCO

Carl Dekleine, Product Manager
(Winner, Governor's Award for Excellence in Exporting, 1980)

The following interview was conducted before Mr. Dekleine left the employ of Unarco. We have retrained it in this publication because the content is still valid.

How did you get into international trade?

A year ago this past spring (1979) a local conference was held. We came back to the office after that conference, sat down and went to work on a little bit of marketing research and decided that there might be a possibility that we could sell these shopping carts and other grocery store equipment throughout the world. On June 16, 1979, we decided to go ahead with it in a concentrated effort and in one year's time we've had a tremendous amount of success.

What percent of your sales?

Right now our international sales are about three percent of our total. We'd like to get it up to five percent this year and we feel that we can do eight to ten percent eventually.

What would you say to a kid desiring to get into international business in any aspect managerial, accountancy, design, engineering?

First of all I'd like to explain why I feel that languages are extremely important. Business in the U.S. has not been geared toward international trade in the past. I believe only six percent of the gross national product now crosses a political border whereas 25% of the world gross national product crosses borders. And we are just entering a time right now where the economy of the U.S. is becoming very dependent on western world economies. The international trade is becoming more and more important and if we're to maintain a lifestyle (like) we have in the U.S. we're going to have to involve ourselves in world trade. This is one point of view having to do with business and sales. Another aspect is that we are becoming an international country right here. This past year we had more visitors to the U.S. than U.S. citizens visiting other countries. And again there is an opportunity for bi- or multilingual individuals to take advantage of a real opportunity. Also we are finding more and more in the work force individuals who have only one language other than English so in managing them again it's very important to have that foreign language. Now as far as recommending studying a foreign language, I would not only say that it's important but it's going to be mandatory. And, not only mandatory for those people who are going to be in a managerial position – it is going to be important for them, obviously – but also for those people who are interested in any aspect of business – secretarial work, plant operation, personnel – almost any type of activity you can think of in the business world. It's not only important, it's going to be mandatory that they have a foreign language.

In your own case, haven't you said something about needing a bilingual secretary and someone bilingual on the shipping dock?

Well, in my involvement over the past year and a half with this thing, I've come to the conclusion for myself to function, it's necessary to have a foreign language and an appreciation for various cultures. I have made the decision that from here on out I would never have a secretary working for me that didn't have a foreign language. Because of our international trade the types of markings we have to have on our shipments going to foreign countries, it's important to have someone even on the shipping dock to understand one or two foreign languages. So the statement that I made was that I would alway be looking for people in our organization who did have a foreign language.

Tell us a bit about your own experience when you realized that you were going to be getting into international marketing.

My background has been primarily in the sciences with a lot of involvement in business. Over the years I never had the inclination to become involved with foreign language studies. And as I became involved with this international thing I felt that it was very necessary to get some training. I enrolled in a local Spanish class, and had a great deal of success with it. It was a lot of fun. It was something I had never done before and I wasn't sure what kind of an aptitude I'd have

but, I've since traveled in Spanish-speaking countries, and find that I can get along very well after just a short period of time. I feel quite comfortable operating in a Spanish-speaking country although I do not negotiate contracts or discuss business in Spanish. Unfortunately my Spanish is not at that level. However, I did receive a telephone call one day from a Spanish-speaking person who had no English and between the two of us we concluded about a $10,000 worth of business over the telephone.

It more than paid the tuition!!

Yes, it more than paid the tuition!

Your Spanish has helped you more in a social way rather than in a business way?

Oh, very much. But, the social aspects of doing business around the world are probably much important than they are in the United States. In most foreign countries, the social aspects are paramount to beginning a business relationship.

It's very important to doing it in their language? At least to make the gesture?

Oh, it's a necessity. A lot of businessmen make the mistake of underestimating it.

Do you have any final comments to make?

The thing that I would suggest is that in the years to come foreign language is going to be the key to a lot of opportunities. I would go even so far as to say that eventually most of us in the United States will be studying a foreign language. Those that get involved with a foreign language at this much time are going to have much greater opportunities than those who don't study foreign languages. I'm talking about those students who are aiming themselves at engineering, the sciences, business, at most any discipline. It's going to be very important many, many opportunities will be open to those who have at least one other language.

LOWRANCE ELECTRONICS

Howard Yeilding, Director of International Sales

Is international trade new for your company?

Yes, we've only been doing it for three years.

What comments would you make regarding foreign language and international trade?

I have a great deal of difficulty traveling (or I feel uncomfortable traveling) and not speaking another language. I can order a meal and ask for things, and tell a taxi driver where I want to go in French and that's about the extent of my language.

Where did you learn the French you do know?

I had two years of French in high school.

I have difficulty getting around – from hotels and offices and getting through or past a receptionist who doesn't speak English even though her boss does.

You're saying that when it's strictly business you get along with English as long as it's with the boss . . .

Well, I really don't have any problem not speaking German, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and French . . . but it would make it a lot more enjoyable and a lot more interesting if I could speak even to one of my customers in his own language. And they would appreciate it too. I think the English tend to speak a foreign language more than we do. I know that when I was in high school it never entered my mind that I would need to use the French I was taking – I had to take it just to get into college.

Does it come back when you have an opportunity to use it?

I get over there so seldom – it's amazing – I'm in France for two or three days at maximum and yet I pick up an awful lot because I had the basics in high school. I pick it up real quick. By the time I leave there I'm doing much better.

Besides business, have there been social situations where a language would have been useful?

That's exactly right. When I go to call on a customer I'm there a long time – and they feel that they have to show me around. Then you go to their home for dinner and it's really a strain then because the wife doesn't speak English – very seldom does the wife speak English.

Are there other positions where foreign language skills would be useful in your company?

It would be nice to have a secretary for example who could write French or German. However, it seems that if we do get something in a foreign language it is in Spanish or French – most other countries write us in English.

What advice would you give a kid looking to international trade?

Well, I can think of a lot of things in high school and college – I would take foreign languages. It would be much more enjoyable doing what I'm doing if I could speak at least one foreign language adequately. I know I'm going to encourage my children to take some time learning a foreign language. I think with a little encouragement I would have taken it more seriously as a student. What struck me being in this business now, in addition to being in marketing, is how big the world seems to us, but when you get to Europe it's just one small community and they pay as much attention to what's going on in the U.S. as we do to what's going on in Texas.

Is your international business growing?

Oh, yes, we doubled our sales last year and . . . it can't do anything but grow for us.

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U.S. SENATE

HENRY BELLMON, Former U.S. Senator

Could you comment for us on perhaps the growing world trade of Oklahoma specifically in agriculture?

I'm not sure I could give you specifics. The fact is that most of the wheat we grow here does go to Asia. It is the export market that makes our agricultural economy here strong. The fact is that companies that aspire to do business with foreign countries need individuals who have an understanding of the culture and the language and the traditions of the people they are dealing with. It is to me regrettable that in our country we've been sort of — I almost want to say self-satisfied. We are heavily dependent upon international commerce for many of the commodities that we need here. Another area that is of growing importance — in fact it's practically reaching a crisis stage — is the fact that the population of Mexico is growing rapidly. That's a language that many people need to learn just to do business right here at home.

Can you recall any specific instances where you've seen a difficulty because of a cultural or language misunderstanding?

I can remember vividly meetings in places like the Soviet Union where our translators tried to monitor the Soviet translators to be sure that they do accurately translate. But we Americans are always at a disadvantage in those meetings because the Russian officials frequently have an understanding of English which they don't use and don't want us to know they have, but we don't have that grasp of their language which puts us at a disadvantage . . . I might also say that last year I was in a delegation that went to Mexico. It was very impressive to hear Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas talk to the President of Mexico in Spanish. He also spoke to members of the Parliment of Mexico in Spanish and I think that made a fine impression.

How would you relate these things to Oklahoma? One problem I have is convincing school people and students and parents that even here there is a need for studying foreign language. The national secondary school foreign language enrollment average is only 15% and in Oklahoma it is only 7.6%. Would you care to comment on that?

Well, a lot of opportunities are going to open up for Oklahomans in foreign countries — China, for instance. We're going to have the opportunity to help China industrialize. Their oil developments will depend heavily on Americans. And there will be good jobs. There will be jobs at $50,000 a year in current terms. Also there are major construction jobs, for instance, in South Africa American companies are building what are called the SASOL plants where they make oil from coal and here is another tremendous opportunity. These plants use like 25,000 highly paid construction workers, pipefitters, electricians and the like. So, young Oklahomans who are now getting an education should recognize that some of the best employment opportunities are going to develop outside the U.S. I mentioned just a few, but places like Brussels and

in Europe, you have opportunities for literally thousands of Americans who can handle different languages and a lot of corporations now are doing almost as much business abroad as they are at home companies like IBM, Caterpillar, even a little company near where I live in Perry, Oklahoma manufactures a machine that is sold virtually all over the world and they have sales people who travel and they need to know the language.

TRAVEL BY INACE

(Oklahoma City)

Liz White, Travel Agent

What kinds of situations have you run into where a skill in a foreign language would have been useful?

It has mainly been in Germany. I know a little about French and Spanish and have gotten by. I've been in a situation where I've missed my train to Munich and Switzerland and it was in a part of Switzerland where people spoke strictly German.

Are there situations where you as a local travel agent here in Oklahoma City need to know a language?

Not frequently. However, if you conduct a tour and use the small, local hotels and other facilities you do run into situations there where the people do not speak English. A basic knowledge of a foreign language is always helpful.

Apart from language skills what do you think one gets out of studying another language? Maybe that's a leading question! Do you feel there are other benefits? Say knowledge of other cultures?

Right! That's a tremendous benefit! That's where you benefit most when you study a foreign language. It's nice to learn how to speak it and it's nice to learn how to read it, but in the foreign language courses you learn the culture of the people, you learn why they are the way they are. There are a lot of clients we wouldn't send to certain countries . . . I think that's how studying foreign language in schools helps out the most in learning the background of the people themselves.

You mean what to expect and what not to expect?

Right. Like in Mexico, if you go to Mexico, you don't expect speedy service; you don't want to go shopping between 1 and 4 because it's not part of their culture. You know, eating dinner late and all that. I think it broadens your mind.

What about other aspects of travel somewhat related to your business such as the need for multi-lingual employees by the airlines?

I hear it's a tremendous help for those in the airline industry, the stewardesses, the people communicating with the clientele on the airplanes. They've got to know . . . because there are a lot of people who don't know anything but their own language. Not everyone can speak English.

Really, I get the opposite response frequently – "Don't worry, everyone can speak English!"

No, that's not true. A lot of the people like stewardesses on the foreign airlines speak a little bit of English, but I don't know if they could really communicate something urgent about missing a connecting flight . . .

And ground personnel?

Yes, with the way the fares are going now, you have to be able to deal with someone who doesn't know English.

How would you answer those who say that foreign language study is not necessary here in the mid U.S.?

I don't think it makes any difference what part of the country you live in for you to speak a foreign language or not. I think it's helpful for anyone no matter where you live. You may want to go out and see the rest of the world some day. I lived in Texas and we took Spanish, but we also took French. I took French from the third grade on. And I sometimes asked myself "Why" when I was younger, but it was helpful to me. Ever since then I've wanted to go to France. I still haven't gone there, but I can read it, and I have the background on the people. I know exactly what Paris looks like and I haven't even seen it.

And you won't be surprised!

No, it won't be a culture shock to me. I think whatever language you want to take – if you want to take Russian, that's fine, I don't think it matters where you live.

Looking back, do you think your foreign language influenced your choosing your present career?

It had a tremendous influence! It really did. I discovered that when they teach you a foreign language they not only make you learn the words and how to read and write it, but they show you slides, tell you what the people are like, what the customs are, and its so interesting. So much so that when I was younger it made me realize that there was some other place besides America where the people were different. I know that's why I'm in the travel business today.

THE ECONOMY COMPANY
(Educational publisher)

Barbara Fry, Vice President Field Editor

Do you find a wide market for your Spanish materials?

We have just been recommended to be listed as the state Spanish reading program in Texas. And, of course, the amazing part of the bilingual community is that there are pockets all around the country.

Are the classroom teachers prepared to handle the situation of having non-English speaking children in their classes?

We've been told by the people in Texas that they do not have enough bilingual teachers who are really fluent in the Spanish language and feel at ease in a classroom. Also, they have students who are not proficient in Spanish or English many times themselves. So the combination creates a problem for the schools and the teachers in the classrooms.

Can we pursue again just how wide-spread you have found the problem to be?

I wish I had the figures here to be more specific. I know that there are areas in Chicago. And, Boston, I believe, is another area. Certainly along the East coast. In Florida, we have the Puerto Rican influence. We have been through a series of efforts to have consultants come in from all these different groups to help us accommodate our materials.

As a publisher do you have full-time salaried persons on your staff who help produce these materials and who are bilingual or is the work contracted out?

Well, number one, we have followed the advice of the bilingual community in that we do not translate English materials into Spanish. Then from that point we had several people that had been in bilingual work in the school system -- all of our editors are former educators. So we had a combination then of reading people who had worked on our staff for some time and who were familiar with reading methodology and with methodology that we would need to follow through with from here. Then also we acquired or added to our staff some bilingual people who had worked in school systems in a supervisory and/or classroom capacity.

What about on the level of secretaries, typist?

That's right. We found it very helpful to have even people who weren't proficient enough to be copy editors or something of that sort. On our staff we were delighted to find a typist for that project. We also have people serving as copy editors that were bilingual.

Is the production of bilingual materials a growing part of your business?

Yes, it is going to be increasing.

OKLAHOMA CHILDREN'S MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Dr. Roy Allen, Director, Center for Continuing Education

Are there many non-English speaking patients who come to your hospital?

There are many within the city itself. Looking at the various groups right here in the city that are basically non-English speaking – there are a lot more than people realize. How do you deal with that? . . . That's an area that's often overlooked that we never think about. Actually as you look at the hospital aspect of health care, I would say that the need for foreign language skills – in admissions, in the emergency room and when the doctors make their rounds with the patients.

What about daily care under the nurses?

That's a tremendous problem. Probably a greater problem with the nursing staff and the physician staff because the nurse in actually the one that is in daily contact with the patient that is seldom addressed in our nursing schools – the need for the foreign language as a part of their curriculum and to my knowledge, I don't believe that in any of our nursing schools that is a requirement.

Nor even recommended, probably.

Right. So where do they pick it up? I do know this, that I've been here 15 months and I have not noticed where they're offering any foreign language courses for their nursing staff. It's a greater problem than people realize. I think Mr. Schott in admissions can give you some feedback as to the admission process.

One of the areas we're looking into regarding critical needs for foreign language skills is the medical field . . .

Well, I think it is critical . . . it's not a daily type of thing, but when you're dealing with health care we find it's very important, in fact, absolutely essential that the people you're dealing with understand what you're trying to convey to them. If it's a mother and child, and if the mother doesn't speak English, she does not understand what is going on and becomes uneasy and that is conveyed to the child which makes the situation worse . . .

Would you recommend that a person interested in hospital administration to take foreign language?

Any place in a hospital -- any area of the hospital you're going to find that you're worth more because you have the ability to communicate in another language. If I'm talking to two people and they're both the same and one of them speaks a foreign language and one doesn't, I'd be inclined to give the job to the one who does because that's just an extra added advantage.

That's the kind of information we need from those like you in the field.

The ability to communicate is basic to everything you do in a service industry and certainly in the health care service industry is a very prime example, if you can't communicate with your patients . . .

It's really that critical?

It really is that critical.

How does the M.D. handle the situation?

I really can't comment except from what I've observed. I suppose you could treat a patient without any communication with the patient, but it would take a much longer period of time because the physician does rely on the patient to tell him even basic things like where it hurts, what's wrong.

It's like Dr. Allen's earlier comparison to a veterinarian working with animals. They can't communicate to the doctor and vice versa.

Yes, very much so. Another item. We require more staff being a children's hospital than an adult hospital. And one of the big reasons is that children can't communicate what their problem is like an adult can. Then, if you take a child who can't speak the language, you have a double barrier.

So you would recommend that languages be a basic part of acquiring a medical education?

Mr. Schott: I think everybody ought to speak a foreign language . . . I think it ought to be required . . . I think you get a better background in your own language to begin with and I think the day where you can say, OK, everybody in the world is going to speak English is over. And if we can communicate with those people we're just that much better off.

Dr. Allen: Of course, again I think it goes back to something we discussed a while ago looking at a greatly mobile society. Relating that mobile society to the various careers that we get into by choice or non-choice, for example, as I indicated a while ago, when I was in high school and even for four years out of high school, when I rodeoed professionally, I never dreamed that 10 years later I'd have a doctor's degree. And I'd never dreamed that I would be working in a College of Medicine, travelling all over the U.S., Canada, Mexico, visiting medical schools; so consequently, I notice in my travels that there are many times that I could have used a foreign language.

Mr. Schott: I can give you two examples; first, my brother (a former foreign language teacher now a law student in Washington State) is working as an intern with the legal aid office in Portland, Oregon, I think one of the reasons he got that job is that they're doing some work with undocumented workers. Now that's right up there close to the Canadian border. Now you wouldn't expect that they ability to speak Spanish would make much difference in Oregon or Washington, but it did. It certainly did. Second, we had a mother here, not too long ago, . . . who didn't speak any English, . . . scared half to death, didn't know what's going, hadn't any way to know what's going on. That's one reason why that gal who works for me . . . is such a valuable employee. She has the ability to go in and make that mother understand what's happening. Then we can develop all the different resources that family has. It's a two sided thing. Not only did they not know what we had to offer for their child; we had no idea what resources the family had to offer . . . if you lose that communication, you've lost an awful lot.

Oklahoma City
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sgt. Tom Mundy, Spokesperson

We've talked to people in business, hospital work, travel, and government about the needs of foreign language skills in their areas. What about the needs for foreign language skills in police work?

I'm not familiar with present requirements. When I was in college there were none. Not even for a liberal arts degree. I think had language filtered up to the higher education system as a requirement today we wouldn't suffer some of the difficulties we do now. In police work, it often becomes critical that we have someone available to interpret. We've had many cases of victims who speak a language other than English, and we've had great difficulty just in taking simple reports. If it is a critical situation, we have even more difficulty. If we have for any reason to contact next of kin, if we need authorization for surgery for a patient. The foreign population of the area is far greater than people realize and is becoming more so. We also have here in the police department several people capable of interpreting the Indochinese languages because they are Vietnam veterans. We're running out of those. We have a rather large Spanish-speaking community here. We have very few Spanish-speaking officers. The German population here I think is larger than one would assume. The basic languages that we encounter and need interpreters for are German, of course we have that – our chief is German, the Spanish dialects, again the Indochinese languages . . . We have students here from all over the world in our engineering schools. That is a part of the problem. The Spanish is growing.

Has there been any effort to provide basic conversational Spanish, let's say, for your officers?

Yes, we have had classes under the auspices of the Mexican American Cultural Center Classes in the basic Mexican language inherent to Oklahoma City. Beyond that, however, we haven't.

Can you think of any specific events where language has been a problem?

We had a woman one night who had been a victim of a robbery. She was German and we could not find a German interpreter. We hadn't the foggiest idea of what had happened to her; we had no way of obtaining a suspect description. We just had to stop everything and call all over town trying to find a German interpreter.

You have found a frequent need for people with language skills?

One of the things we always like to see is a bilingual person, and not a bilingual person because he took a year of Spanish in high school. We want to see someone who has actively pursued language also in their college career and who has become quite adept at being able to speak the language and understand it and be able to interpret which is far more difficult . . . Muddling your way through can cost someone his life. At the hospital, for example, if the doctor can't get you to sign a statement because you're unconscious they're not going to operate on you until they find someone who can . . . There are many cases where we cannot take a basic police report without an interpreter.

We're doing a slide/tape presentation on careers where foreign language skills will be an asset and Sgt. Mundy throught you'd like to comment because of your personal interest.

Yes, I was raised in a German community in Kansas. Then my parents sent me back to a boarding school in Germany until I was 13 then they sent me to Heidelberg University for a degree . . . and I learned English when I was eight. I was raised in a Mennonite community in Kansas and my parents were very suspicious of an American education so they packed me up and shipped me off to Germany to boarding school until I was 13.

But you don't have an accent at all.

Well, I try not to have.

And that shows what learning languages at an early age can do?

Right.

What comments would you make about police work and officers having skills in foreign language?

Well, it's necessary in the streets because we have so many Vietnamese now; Hispanics in the metropolitan area. We have 10,000 Germans, about 2,000 Koreans, and with the influx we have become an international community. We need the language expertise. And the problem I find is that when they learn it in a university setting they apparently can't use it in a street setting. I would advise them to take the basic courses at the university or wherever and pick up the street language and the dialects. That's what's important. We can use it everyday in this city. Right now.

Is the problem increasing?

Yes. Tourism is a big item here. And I've had a number of Germans call me because officers have them call me here to ask me a question about the state or where to go or whatever because the officer thought they spoke German because that's what it sounded like.

Have there been problems regarding tourists as victims?

Not really. We've been lucky. But it would be so much nicer if the officer could speak some languages. I don't know whether you've been to Albuquerque, New Mexico, but I was there to help select the chief of police there and they pay $50 a month more to officers who have dual languages.

Throughout the staff? On beginning salaries?

Yes.

Do we do that here yet?

No, because I pay for college degrees, and that would be an additional burden to pay for that. But I have a number of officers that speak Russian, German, Spanish, Korean and Swedish, Norwegian. Sometimes they're not on duty when needed.

But you would advise a kid nowadays thinking of law enforcement to study languages?

I would advise a youngster taking any degree to get some minimal skills in languages because it makes them a better reader; it's kind of nice to look at an original text in German or Polish or whatever it is to have a little different view of things, and I think it helps you comprehend the English language a bit better because so many words are so similar.

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